

CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)
OPENING STATEMENT FOR H-PRIZE HEARING
April 27, 2006

I want to welcome everyone here today for what has turned out to be a very auspiciously timed hearing.

Suddenly, the whole nation is focused on gas prices and our “addiction to oil” and the Congress is in a panic trying to figure out how to respond. Our options in the immediate future are limited, but our options in the mid- and long-term are not. And unless we exercise those options, we are going to lurch from oil crisis to oil crisis and each one is going to get worse, and the toll on our economy will grow. The future will be grim if we don’t act now.

There are many steps we need to begin to take. For starters, we need to reduce demand by means such as imposing tighter fuel economy standards. But over the longer-run we need to find ways to run our transportation system on substances other than petroleum, including biofuels and perhaps hydrogen.

The hydrogen economy holds out great promise but it also presents great hurdles. We are pretty far away from knowing how to create, store, distribute and use hydrogen cleanly and efficiently. We need devote all the ingenuity we can muster to attack this problem.

That’s why I was so pleased when Chairman Inglis introduced H.R. 5143 – an innovative approach to encouraging innovative research. The bill is carefully crafted both to encourage ongoing work that can lead to incremental improvements in hydrogen technology, and to draw more scientists and engineers into trying to remove the highest hurdles on the hydrogen highway.

We know from history that prizes can help solve tough technical problems. And this Committee has a record of promoting the use of prizes; we created the highly successful Malcolm Baldrige Award and most recently we established a prize program at NASA. Prizes can draw more money and more people into the search for technological solutions and they can provoke more inventive thinking.

Now, no one is suggesting that this prize substitute for the existing hydrogen R&D programs, which the President and this Committee have strongly supported. Those programs are necessary to make sure the nation has a cadre of experts engaging in ongoing work in this area. But we can expand the pool of financial and human resources further with prizes.

So I'm eager to hear from our experts today on the specifics of the bill. I expect that this bill will move through the House swiftly, and we want to make sure we've got this program written in exactly the right way. We also have to examine the funding levels in the bill: we want them high enough to make a difference, but not any higher than that, given how tight the federal budget is. My guess is that the top prize could be reduced to \$10 million without reducing the program's impact.

But while we work out the details, we shouldn't miss the larger message. This Committee is committed to moving forward with new ways to promote new technologies. I think the H-Prize fits that bill.

I congratulate Mr. Inglis for proposing it and for working so closely with the Committee in drafting his bill. And I will yield the remainder of my time to him. Mr. Inglis.